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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses peace education curriculum in the Milwaukee (Wisconsin) Public School district. The peace education promotion has been in existence for 10 years and was created in response to rising levels of violence. Specifically examined are the uses of peace education at Fritsche Middle School, a school that has proven the positive effects of using peace education in reform efforts and has exhibited a high level of peace education practice in the school. The paper explores the perceptions of eight school personnel about the formal peace education/conflict resolution efforts that occur at this school and the impact these efforts have upon the climate of the school and the creation of a peaceful learning environment. The research also involved 18 students with varying degrees of interest and participation in the school's conflict resolution program. It explores students' activities that directly counteract violence in the school and examines the extension of these peacemaking endeavors into the students' home and community lives. The paper concludes by identifying aspects of peace education that are in need of improvement in schools, even those as successful as Fritsche, and discusses how these problems inhibit the effectiveness of conflict resolution programs and peace education endeavors. Contains 45 references. (EH)

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PEACE EDUCATION: COOLING THE CLIMATE OF SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

The Milwaukee Public School (MPS) district has promoted peace education for the past 10 years in response to rising levels of violence. This paper discusses peace education curriculums at MPS and specifically examines the uses of peace education at Fritsche Middle School -- a school that has proven the positive effects of using peace education in reform efforts. Fritsche stood out among several representative Milwaukee Public Schools as worthy of an individual study because of the level of commitment to peace education practiced in the school.

The paper explores the perceptions of eight school personnel about the formal peace education/conflict resolution efforts that occur at this school and the impact these efforts have upon the climate of the school and the creation of a peaceful learning environment. The research also involved 18 students with varying degrees of interest and participation in the school's conflict resolution program. It explores the student's activities which directly counteract violence in the school and examines the extension of these peacemaking endeavors into the students' home and community lives as well. Finally, the paper examines identified aspects of peace education that are in need of improvement in schools, even those as successful as Fritsche, and discusses how these problems inhibit the effectiveness of conflict resolution programs and peace education endeavors.

PEACE EDUCATION: COOLING THE CLIMATE OF SCHOOLS

On 15 May 1995, Desmond Tutu, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, made an appearance in Milwaukee, WI. A delegation from Fritsche Middle School attended and a sixth grade student representative publicly presented a banner to Rev. Tutu. The presenter, described as a straight A student, was beaten up at her bus stop the next day, and the girl who beat her up threatened to bring a gun to school the following day and kill her. In an attempt to protect herself, the outstanding peacemaker brought a gun to Fritsche and stored it in her locker. Other students who witnessed the incident on the previous day approached her to see if she had decided to arm herself, and one responsible student unloaded the gun before they arrived at school and reported the weapon to the assistant principal. The gun was discovered, and the girl was expelled from school and arrested in accordance with district policy. The entire school was shocked and devastated by the incident. According to the assistant principal, "We all wondered how this could happen to her. She was not a troublemaker."

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Recognizing the Need for Peace

During the 1980s critics of education in the United States advanced many reform proposals to address the failure of public education (Carnegie, 1986; Sizer, 1984). Most of these proposals were based upon an economic argument that the United States was losing its competitive edge because of a poorly trained work force (Shea, 1989). In short, the nation was at risk because of the poor performance of the schools. Conservative critics argued that the way to improve schools, and subsequently the economic vitality of this nation, was to teach basic skills and impose nationalized standards upon elementary and secondary schools. These reform efforts harkened back to traditional notions of schools, urging educators to focus their teaching on the core academic curriculum and placing a strong emphasis on the industrial model of competition over cooperation.

Undergirded by competitiveness, modernism plays a considerable role in the creation of many problems in today's schools. The commitment to modernity is an attempt to encourage the world to think about natural occurrences in life in scientific ways and to use rational methodologies when understanding and acting on conflict in human society (Toulmin, 1990). Thus, this philosophy creates win-lose situations and contributes to human behavior that results in various types of violence. In a postmodern world, peace reform movements address concerns of violence within cultural circumstances -- national disarmament, ethnic and regional wars, human rights, domestic violence, refugee relocation, street crime, economic underdevelopment, and ecological and nuclear issues. With this in mind, school reformers who ignore the various roles of violence in their pupils' lives are relying on or constructing utopian curricula while ignoring the conflagration that is destroying the hopes, determination, and self confidence of young people. In spite of the many studies that show that

children are being exposed to more violence than ever before (Children's Defense Fund, 1991), educational leaders are late in acknowledging the promise of peace education to improve schooling.

The concern about violence in schools has been reflected at the national level with the Goals 2000: Educate America Act which states as one of its goals that by the year 2000 every school in the United States will be free of violence. We have to question, however, the sincerity of reports that do little to address the institutional violence in schools and more importantly in society, and only mention the surface violence as the crux of what needs to be addressed. As with many other notions of school reform, this kind of mandate situates the problem at the surface, asking those with least power to ameliorate their problems. We need to change social norms in the United States so that people entrenched in these cultural contexts with which peace educators are concerned have belief and hope in our seemingly violent institutions. As a nation, we must view violence as a last resort and demonstrate creative, nonviolent solutions to conflict (DeJong, 1994, 14).

Peace education has largely been an attempt to assuage the affects of the rational, scientific aspect of schooling and life in general. During the nineteenth century, it was heralded as a way to avoid the scourge of modern warfare (Fink, 1980). One of its champions in this century, Maria Montessori (1949), argued that peace education was the best way to counteract the hatred of fascism. More recently, feminist scholars have argued that the patriarchal assumptions supporting militaries deny resources necessary to develop healthy children (Brock-Utne, 1985; Reardon, 1988). Meanwhile, poor and minority students who overwhelmingly populate U.S. urban schools, those believed to be most violent, are locked into the structural violence of attending schools that are unwilling or unable to address their educational needs (Ladson-Billings and Henry, 1990). Different approaches to peace education have in common the attempt to help young people understand the sources of violence in their

lives and to create in their minds both the desire for peace and the skills needed to nonviolently exist in the world (Harris, 1988). Supporters of this postmodern educational reform understand that children will not be successful in school until a secure and comforting environment is created and maintained for them (Craig, 1992).

Peace education based upon the work of the Brazilian educator, Paulo Friere (1970), helps adults name forms of violence in their lives and identify ways to respond to the problems of structural violence, where people have no human rights, live in violent neighborhoods, and lack such basic essentials as health care, housing, food, or shelter (Galtung, 1975). With this understanding of structural violence, the situation in the inner cities of the United States is a vast part of the concern of peace educators (Prothrow-Stith, 1992).

Peace educators' efforts move beyond responding to isolated crises by teaching their students about the roots of violence and how to respond to conflict constructively. They understand that schools can provide a safe haven where young people can learn about alternatives to violence. Although schools often seem powerless to counteract the influence of parents and peers who promote violence, teachers who embrace peace education are trying to nurture in children the seeds of compassion rather than hatred, competition, and revenge (Harris, 1993).

Educational reformers adopting the goals of peace education study all different forms of violence. Violence, in its broadest sense, includes physical, psychological, and structural violence and can be caused by thoughts, words, and deeds--any dehumanizing behavior that intentionally harms another. Physical violence includes direct harm to others--juvenile crime, gang attacks, sexual assault, random killings, and physical forms of punishment. Psychological forms of violence occur often in schools and homes, diminishing a child's sense of worth. Structural violence comes from the structure of a society whose institutions deny certain basic rights and freedoms; such as citizens who can not find work that provides economic security, obtain health care or

safe housing, or whose civil rights are violated.

Peace educators go right to the core of a person's values--teaching respect for others, open mindedness, empathy, concern for justice, willingness to become involved, commitment to human rights, and environmental sensitivity (Peace, 1992). Teachers using peace education reforms base their work on a nonviolent approach to life that reflects the teachings from the historical insights of Jesus Christ, Buddha, Martin Luther King Jr., Tolstoy, Thoreau, Mother Theresa, and Cesar Chavez, to the more current thinking of Carol Gilligan, Jane Martin, Nel Noddings, Gloria Ladson-Billings and bell hooks. They provide a holistic approach to the problems of violence; teaching about the root causes of conflict, not simply attempting to stop one kind of violence (e.g., handguns in schools). Peace educators help children appreciate differences, work cooperatively to solve problems, promote respect for human rights, and provide images of adults striving to make the world a better place.

Supporters of peace education address the chaotic, frightening aspects of this world by helping young people understand the nature of violence, and stress the potential of nonviolence to solve the problems caused by conflict (Bernat, 1993; Lawson, 1984). Peace educators realize that students entrenched in conflict don't fail in schools because they are stupid, but rather that the problems of violence are so overwhelming to youth that they can't focus on school assignments. Furthermore, many students find it impossible to connect with an educational system that has traditionally expounded ideals and promoted principles that are not conducive to peace. Children will not improve their learning until adults directly address the emotional stresses young people face in a violent world. Educational reforms that ignore these problems of violence are like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. The best intentions of adult educators will be undermined by icebergs of violence lurking directly under the surface of children's lives.

Background and Methodology

As violence from home, community, and society creeps into elementary, middle, and high schools, school personnel in the 1990s throughout the United States are left to independently discover and employ peace education to address acts of violence carried out in schools. This paper was developed from two studies conducted in various Milwaukee urban schools seeking answers to the widespread incidence of violence in this particular district. A general study (Harris, 1994) about peace education efforts in six elementary, three middle, and three high schools in the Milwaukee Public School district prompted the second study (the core of this paper) which focuses on one particular school from within the general study. This school was chosen for the focus study because it exhibited exemplary endeavors in reaching and maintaining an atmosphere that is peaceful and conducive to nonviolent attitudes and behaviors. The general study created a foundation by providing a wide range view of what the Milwaukee Public School system is doing to increase the peace from grades K-12. The study involved researcher observation, informal narrative gathering, and document review.

In 1985 the school district in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (MPS) adopted a resolution endorsing peace studies at all levels and developed a peace studies curriculum (Haessley, 1991). Although the peace studies curriculum in Milwaukee Public schools originally had a focus on the threat of nuclear war, by 1990 teachers in Milwaukee were focussing their efforts on violence in schools, homes, and urban communities in response to the kind of terror expressed by students and in response to rising levels of community crime. Milwaukee, like many other urban areas in the United States, has experienced escalating levels of homicide, drug related violence, domestic abuse, street crime, and gang violence. In 1993, 19 children under 18 in Milwaukee were shot dead

and 144 were wounded (Bothwell & Lawrence, 1994). Numerous other children were traumatized by these events, as they are throughout most urban areas of the United States. Because of the high levels of violence in their students' lives, teachers, administrators and other school personnel in Milwaukee, are turning to peace studies to find ways to reach and teach young people.

The MPS peace curriculum is divided into three sections--elementary, middle, and high school. The elementary curriculum has activities that can be added to already existing lessons and includes: friendship; my own and others feelings; respecting the community and all those in it; getting along and working together; cause and effect in history and today; and living peacefully in the world (Milwaukee Public Schools, 1985).

The MPS middle school peace education curriculum focuses on conflict resolution and problem solving. It provides strategies that include taking turns, negotiating, compromising, communication clarification, ventilating, apologizing, exaggeration, sharing, avoiding conflict, acknowledging feelings, and appeals to authority. It also encourages students and teachers to explore community, national, and global conflicts.

The original MPS high school curriculum directly addressed the nuclear threat. This curriculum has been rewritten to stress human rights, domestic violence, the contributions of peace movements, and nonviolence. In 1991 the whole school system adopted a set of goals which include the following: 1) students will demonstrate positive attitudes towards life, living, and learning through an understanding and respect of self and others; 2) students will make responsible decisions, solve problems, and think critically; 3) students will demonstrate responsible citizenship and an understanding of global interdependence; and 4) students will learn strategies to cope with the challenges of daily living and will establish practices which promote health, fitness, and safety (Milwaukee Public Schools, 1991, p. 4).

Having used these approaches to assuage violence in the Milwaukee system, many schools have reported measures of success. Fritsche Middle School, however, distinguished itself because of the documented evidence of a commitment to peace education and nonviolence which is displayed and practiced in the school. Not only are the students reporting positive feedback in response to the school's peacemaking efforts, but Fritsche's teachers and administration alike claimed a sincere dedication to implementing and practicing philosophies of peace within the classrooms and entire school environment.

To gain a greater understanding of the Fritsche atmosphere, the researchers used ethnographic method in data collection to reveal the meanings placed upon peace education within this school by the daily participants. The concentrated study, which included participant observation and extensive document review added the dimension of individual interviews with eight school personnel members who were identified by school community nomination (Foster, 1991) as exemplary peace educators. An additional 18 students were interviewed who possessed varying degrees of involvement in the school's peace mission. These data, which is the focus for this paper, shows many facets of a school that has been widely recognized and awarded for its contributions to peace education. They have worked diligently to destroy the climate of unrest that once pervaded this community and made the school a place where kids want to be.

Middle School Efforts in Peace Education

According to the concluding report of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1995), middle school aged students are at an optimal time in their lives to receive peace education. This is the opportunity when students of this age group are

developing the capabilities of understanding the complexities of the institutions in which they currently, and in the future, will play a vital role. Peace educators at the middle school level are seizing an impressionable moment in their students' lives when they incorporate these principles into their classroom practices. The administration and teachers at Fritsche Middle School are influencing their students with these ideas and experiencing success.

In 1987, Fritsche was a typical urban middle school with high rates of suspension, fighting, and failure. The school was filled with students who had little or no contact with people outside of their immediate neighborhoods and this was reflected in the school's atmosphere. Located in a traditionally white section of Milwaukee's south side, African Americans have not always felt welcome to travel in this part of town, much less send their children to school there. Milwaukee's practice of school choice, however, led some African American students to Fritsche, but not by their first choice. Additionally, this area is fast becoming a haven for many Latinos looking for housing in areas where family and friends have previously been accepted. Thus, the area continues to experience tremendous transition within the student body and community immediately surrounding the location of the school building.

In 1988, Fritsche received a new principal committed to using principles of peace education and creating a school environment where everyone felt they belonged. In his narrative he explained his first job at Fritsche was exposing and examining the hidden curriculum that exists in many educational environments:

> When I started here I realized we had a culturally diverse group of people among our staff and students. If everyone is not represented, then people start getting hidden agendas, hidden meanings. They don't say these things, but they're there. There's the tone. So I did my best to get rid of all that stuff. We had student announcers, for example, and they were two white females, and I told the guy that was in charge of the announcements to give me two more, and they were a carbon copy of the

same two. I said, wait a minute, this isn't reflective of our population. This sends a negative message to all of our kids. So, we actively made sure that we did everything we could to get rid of some of that hidden curriculum. And I think that helps the tensions in the building. That connects people. That gets people together.

The second thing that I did was emphasize the importance for kids and staff to all be kind of on the same level. And I did that through orientation and working with kids. I told them that it's okay to look at people. I mean in this building, to be successful, and I'm not going to infringe on your own culture and your own values, but in this building, it's okay to connect with people, to make eye contact. Look at people. Because in the world of work, in the world that you're going to be successful in, that's sort of an acceptable way of interacting with people. And we talked about that, and we worked with kids on that. There's probably no one else that has done that, but we've done that.

His efforts have manifested in many other areas throughout the school building. He initiated a peer mediation program in the likeness of one he had prior experience with in the middle where he was assistant principal before coming to Fritsche. In the 1991-92 academic year, students led 273 peer mediation sessions. During this time period the suspension rate of the school declined from 31% to 10%. The reason he gives for these statistics is the sense of security spawned by the program which places 45 students in charge of resolving conflict among the student body members. He truly believes that "most kids don't want to fight, but they don't know how to solve the problem and save face. This [program] provides a way" (Milwaukee Sentinel, 1989).

Teaching Peace Within the Curriculum

"Hitting the students head on" with the principles of peace education was this administrator's way of expressing his efforts to gain ground in the area of violence

prevention. Fritsche has posters throughout the school building that serve as a constant reminder to students to stay positive and believe in themselves. The principal and faculty have indoctrinated the students with the philosophy of peace by including it in every aspect of their school day. The principal cited an example of how powerful their efforts have been on the students:

> I had a substitute teacher come to me and say, "You know I've never seen anything like this before. There were two kids in the locker room having an argument, and one of the kids came up to me and said that they were a mediator and that they would solve the problem, and they sat down on the bench and they did it." So when kids talk about mediation, and parents talk about it, parents will come to you and say, "I want my kid to have mediation with someone", then you know that you've gotten the word out there.

This administrator's attitude has pervaded the entire school body. He expressed the need to have a building full of workers who are supportive of the peace education effort so that kids will know they have entered a positive situation. Already in place before his arrival, the assistant administrator also possessed a strong background in peace making efforts, and her 40 years of experience have provided Fritsche with a wealth of support and wisdom. She described the peace work she is doing as nothing new to her, "I don't know that back in the 70s we named it peace education. I think we called it community building." Phrased in a number of ways, the most important aspect of the kind of work she describes is that it begins in the classroom with the intentions that students will take the skills and ideas they learn with them into their home and community lives. Prior to her work at Fritsche, she taught math and social studies and relied on the team and community building concepts within her classroom. "Now, I continue to do that. Since I've come to Fritsche, I think that what we've been doing here is building a caring community." Many of the teachers wholeheartedly support this commitment to creating an environment of peace and cooperation and

expressed this in their narratives about how they were contributing to Fritsche's atmosphere.

The six teachers who agreed to participate were selected by their colleagues as the teachers most committed to peace education within the building. One teacher in particular, who is the chairperson of the human relationship committee, sought out specific training in peace education. The administration has supported her work by giving her leave time to increase her knowledge and abilities in creating a peaceful school environment, and she, quite naturally, was seen as the most effective and engaged peace educator in the building. She stated that having the entire staff's support has greatly contributed to the success of the peer mediation program that she organizes:

> The staff doesn't belittle it. They really encourage it. I mean they don't hold kids back. They'll send kids to mediation. They see it as an important part of the school and it's kind of a fun thing too -- to see a kid empowered and able to use the skills effectively. It's also encouraging when you get a child who is a leader and they're being negatively influenced, but to win them over and get that real strong student who is highly respected among his peers -- not a goody-goody two shoes, but somebody who the other student's view as cool -- is very encouraging. We have all kinds of kids as mediators. We even have some cognitively disabled kids as mediators so that our whole school population is represented.

Her views strongly reflect the administration's efforts to encourage a climate of cooperation and community by including all aspects of the student body into the peace education efforts. The support is evidenced from all constituents in the school building, and this accomplishment is a result of the unrelenting desire on the staff's part to keep the message of peace on the minds of all the school participants, administration, staff and students alike. The peer mediation coordinator continued to explain how they do this:

> We have the peace messages in our daily announcements and on posters all over the building, and we just try to keep that reminder out there. I tell them that it's not like you're out in an alley somewhere and nobody cares. You're right here in this building and everybody cares. Not only the staff but the other students care how you solve your problems. So, conflict is very natural and normal, but you can't go through your entire lives beating everybody up -- you have to learn different ways to resolve conflict.

Other staff members are actively using their classrooms and the curriculum as a springboard for initiating discussions that encompass the content as well as the message of peace. The art teacher at Fritsche described peace education as the core of her curriculum. She claimed that she would not be teaching if it had to be any other way. She uses story telling in her class to enhance the art experience and to infuse peace making theories into her required activities:

> I tell them about my father who is an old Norwegian who gave me 160 acres of swamp land. I've been paying taxes on that for thirty-five years, and I haven't stepped on it since I was a little girl when I used to go out with him and cut ice blocks for the ice box. But he told me you have to remember an old Indian philosophy and that is we do not own this land. We have to leave it just as good or better than we found it. He told me it had to maintain the water level and be there for the animals. Don't drain it. Don't sell it. Don't abuse it. And then I will go into a visualizing affect to teach my art, and ask the kids to imagine what our world would be like if everyone held to that philosophy. You wouldn't throw refuse out. Company leaders would think first about how they are affecting our air and water. What we don't understand and what seems not to be taught is that many people think that money and material things will get you where you want to go. But if the water and air is gone and we don't have good health for everyone, then all the money in the world won't do any good. Oh, we forget, but this is part of my peace education.

The structuring of Fritsche into family units is one method used to organize middle schools within the Milwaukee Public School district. This particular format is

based on teacher collaboration within grade level units. In a family unit, three or four teachers who cover the core courses of English, math, science, and social studies all work with the same 120 students. These students only work with teachers within their family unit, so that the teachers are more familiar with work their students are doing in other classes and if any problems arise, the family unit is better equipped to handle it. When a parent comes to Fritsche to discuss the child's educational progress or any problems that may be occurring, they talk with the entire family of teachers within the unit. This offers the greatest amount of perspective for the particular situation each student is facing and provides much greater synergy among the unit teachers.

Two teachers found that changing times which resulted in the creation of the family units and the influence of modernity as factors that redefined their old jobs of teaching social studies and math in a traditional way. The family units do not include computer technology, so even though their traditional content areas were core subjects, the need for competent computer instruction influenced their redesignation. Because he perceived the computer lab as being misused, one math teacher adopted the lab as his classroom:

> I'm a math and computer teacher, basically. Math trained, however, I just got into computers because I was complaining to the principal about how the computer labs were being misused, and he said " You think you can do better? Here!" and I started doing it.

He claims that the computer technology and the math are boring out of context. He has been striving to keep his students interested by creating math related work that they can perform on their computers and by using:

> math technology that helps that kids do what they want to do. In math, we take surveys related to kids' interests, you know, whether it be on what's your favorite t.v. show or favorite song. I do this little activity in the class with data bases, where the kids go to a data base with teams, actually ten teams. And usually here, the kids argue over the team

> colors, or who the stars are, or the team name, like Orlando Magic, or San Francisco 49ers. I don't say a thing, really, except tell them that they got to put in the meaning of the team. Some kid tells you, " Hey! It's called the 49ers because of the 1849 gold rush or Orlando Magic because of the Magic Kingdom. And that's kind of getting information in sideways that they don't really realize. So, there's a lot of little things, like the Green Bay Packers, because it was originally a meat packing town, that you can do, if you get a chance to think about it.

Contextualizing the work has provided opportunities for the inclusion of historical information that may not be covered in the traditional social studies classes offered in the middle school curriculum. Fritsche's other computer teacher also chose not to abandon his content with his transfer into a more technological area of teaching:

> I've tried to bring the technology into the social studies curriculum. Instead of leaving behind all of these things that I've really grown to enjoy in social studies, I've tried to use the technology as a tool that enhances things that really kind of drive me to teach, which are social studies concepts. We learn about some of the social problems that exist in our culture today -- bombings and societal conflicts that are going on right now. To me, these are the kinds of issues that you can bring to a classroom and get kids interested.

His efforts in technology extend beyond the walls of Fritsche Middle School with his participation in a program geared to encourage the use of technology in other countries. He sees this endeavor as not only a way to increase global use of technology, but also as a way to encourage the positive use of the technology and creating learning opportunities for our own benefit as well. He sees his work expanding into the area of continuing education for the school staff who are sometimes lagging behind in this burgeoning area of education:

> I run a project here called "Bridges to Democracy", and I'm going to South Africa this summer to meet with another computer coordinator over there who lives in a black township. We are busy trying to put together a communications network for educators which would reach out

> to their township and help facilitate the use of this communications technology there. We want to promote literacy and their connections to the rest of the world. It's also a way for teachers here to learn about the glaring differences in culture between what happens here and what happens there.

Additionally, he has taken his student's computer skills to a higher level by introducing them to the Internet. This teacher's commitment to global peace education has prompted his involvement in a program that facilitates his social studies agenda in a very contemporary and contextual way:

> I already have many of my students using technology. I have them use the computers to telecommunicate with other kids. They have e-mail accounts and then they establish and maintain relationships with the students over there. This has been a way for them to learn about the culture there. Also, Wisconsin Public Television came to our school and filmed here and then N-Net in South Africa went to the children's village and filmed there. We swapped tapes and a program was created about these kids and what they are learning from each other. It turned out to be a really interesting experience because many of the kids had no idea that they were communicating with kids who were of a different skin color or were able to speak a different language from them.

Learning and Practicing Nonviolence

> Peace education keeps a good reputation for our school, so other kids will want to come here. And they don't think that it's just a mean school, so they won't go somewhere else. They feel welcome to come here, and that's the message. I think that [peace education] is good, so then people think that this is like a cool school because they give you opportunity for mediation.
>
> Fritsche eighth grader

Surprisingly, every student at Fritsche who participated in the research had a clear concept of what peace education is and was able to competently expound on their ideas. Those who participated came from a wide range of exposure to nonviolence teachings with six students formally participating as peer mediators; six having been involved in a mediation session because of an incident of violence in their lives; and lastly, six who had no direct interaction with the school's peer mediation efforts to create and maintain a peaceful environment. Students named a variety of issues from the reduction of arguing, fighting, and guns in school to teaching people how to get along and solve their differences in safe ways as vital aspects of peace education.

Students acknowledged the staff's success with including peace education in their classroom activities. They cited the teachers' attempts to develop partnerships in class assignments as a way to encourage friendships and increase togetherness among the student body. Several student comments supported the teachers' narratives about their own work toward increasing the students' awareness of peace at every teachable moment:

> In my social studies class, she teaches about racism, and the way you should like everybody. We all need to care for each other, so we shouldn't be fighting.
>
> We're learning about not wasting the earth because we have to stay here for the rest of our lives. She says don't waste it.
>
> In health class, we discuss violence, guns, and alcohol abuse in relation to our bodies. We share stories about these issues.
>
> Some teachers incorporate peace education into the lesson; they tell stories about people who have been at odds and learned to be friends by helping each other out.

Many teachers were given credit by the students as being committed to Fritsche's program of being a school that is all about peace. All teachers were cited as

teaching student to resolve conflict and encouraging mediation. There was some distinction in the student narratives between some teachers being more committed to the peace theme, as was reflected in the teacher nominations of good peace educators in the building:

> The good teachers that think about peace, they'll put you down for mediation and they'll set you up with mediation. Some teachers, when they see conflict, some of them just don't [think about mediation]. They just let you like go ahead and fight. But most teachers they stop you and put you down for mediation.

Peer mediation seemed to be the most talked about form of peace education that the students discussed. Their perceptions varied from believing that mediation was very important to disregarding it as something to which students paid little attention. Most agreed that mediation was something that all the students were aware of because of the school's focus on peace themes. One student recalled the way the students take part in getting the message of mediation across:

> There was a group of us, two sixth graders, two seventh graders, and a couple eighth graders. We did a skit in front of all the sixth graders, the new kids. And it showed different ways to help. I mean we did a mock mediation in front of everybody else. We showed them what it's like, that there's nothing wrong with it.

Other students discussed their personal endeavors with peace education and how working with the mediation program had encouraged them to practice their skills. Here was the exchange between three students in a focus group setting discussing their efforts to mediate and keep peace at Fritsche:

> Sometimes you can mediate yourself. You can ask yourself what you're doing. Why don't I think about what this would do. Think about it.

> Yep. I lose my temper faster than any other person, and then they started putting me in mediation. I mean, I had to go to mediation

everyday because I was uncomfortable with people. They had to put me in mediation to help me with my self-esteem.

Sometimes I say, let's not talk for two or three weeks. Then you can think about what you did, what you said. Most of the time you get angry, and you do things you don't want to do. And then sometimes you can't get out of it, and that's when you need to go mediate.

Regardless of their involvement in the peer mediation program, they all cited incidents in school and in their homes and communities where they were able to exercise their peacemaking skills with a discernible degree of success. These students remembered events of racial unrest that they were able to cool down with their level-headedness:

Well, some people just don't realize. They think just because they live on a block, they can't really get used to living right across from someone who's different. They think they shouldn't be around there. Well, once I got to know people on my block, they didn't see my color. Then my friends [from my block] started making trouble with my other friends, and then the people on the block realized that they shouldn't be doing it. Most of the people are black people on my block, and if they see a white person come down here, they try to beat them up or something. But most of the time I can stop them.

On my block we're all white, but whenever some black people come over, one of my other friends wants to fight a lot. So I tell them to try what I do, and not talk to each other for a while, so they can think it out. And after that, they can become friends again, and not fight.

Checking the Climate Gage: Future Considerations

All of the students in this study acknowledged that although peace education has been and continues to be a proven method of reducing and eliminating many of the conflicts that arise in this middle school environment, peer mediation was not a perfect

solution to the problems they faced. As one student phrased it, "We're not really impacted because people still fight. They do go to mediation, and some of them stop fighting, but others, they're still doing it." They discussed as serious peer mediation program problems the residual conflicts that arise between students who try to mediate and the bitterness experienced by some mediators who are ostracized after they fail to maintain objectivity in a session:

> Sometimes, when I try to stop people from fighting, they get angry at me. If we're trying to break them up, they get angry with the person who tried to stop them, and then some people, they'll fight with [the mediator]. They won't try to talk. Sometimes, they want to have a fight with both of you.

Other students cited the nomination and training process as an area of mediation that could stand improvement. Students were selected to participate in the program and found themselves locked in to continue as mediators for several years, eliminating the opportunity for other students to take an active leadership role in the mediation process. One sixth grader stated, "Many people who could do this are overlooked and other people would like to have the chance. The mediators seem to get special treatment. They get free pizza and the rest of us feel it is unfair because we give the school services, too." Even at their ages, they realize the limitations of programs like peer mediation to fully display a democratic model and furthermore, to address the depth of some of the problems that students bring with them to school. Another student expressed this sentiment in her narrative:

> Sometimes they don't get it. Mediation is a little bit limited. It doesn't reach out to everyone. These conflicts sometimes effect a lot of people involved; just having two people come is not really fixing it.

Recognizing the benefits and rewards of the peace education efforts at Fritsche is the beginning of understanding how this middle school works. Realizing what has yet to be done puts a more clear focus on how school climates can be peaceful and

furthermore, how schools can improve on the work currently being done. Teachers, too, acknowledged the bounds of the peace education efforts at Fritsche and had ideas of ways to improve upon what is happening now. Some students need more than what peer mediation and even the school's peace theme can offer. The impressions of one particular teacher is that there is more work to be done, and he expresses the need for schools to look at these issues with more depth:

> I'm happy to say that looking throughout the building we have a lot of these things in place, so I feel that we as a school are moving forward, but it's not done. I think that we need to do more in this respect, because as you know urban districts are faced with this high mobility turnover, etc. . . . So, you constantly need to be aware and have these skills. If this is not part of your arsenal, you're doing the wrong work. We need to be able to work with these students as they come and be ready to stop a lesson and to address the need right there, right when it happens.

He continued:

> I think we spend a lot of time talking about gangs. We get the handouts, but to me they are almost like getting a most wanted list with things to look for. It doesn't tell us how to reach them. I think we're all pretty good at identifying things that look a little different or strange to us, but can we say that it's ok if Johnny, in his neighborhood, finds himself in a gang for whatever reason? What is it that I can do now though to still reach him; to still teach what I need to teach? And what other ways do I want to deliver these services to him?

This educator really sees the negligence inherent in a situation like this as an act of violence that Fritsche and many other schools have not adequately resolved. This is a problem where alternative education generally comes up as an option for students who are designated too difficult or dangerous to educate. His statements call into question the traditional school settings' responsibility for meeting or not meeting the needs of these kids.

One of the computer technology teachers put himself underneath the microscope when he discussed his academic work and how it plays into a developed notion of peace education:

> My program really is not about technology for technology's sake. It's really about changing the way we teach -- in a way that adapts to the new demands that technology is putting on our culture.

He considered his work in South Africa and during the interview began to examine the assumptions that could easily be overlooked when working with less advanced countries. He described his role in this project as a teacher, learner and facilitator, and cited the inherent need for all of those facets to be a part of who he is as an educator interested in creating and maintaining peace:

> I don't want to go over there pushing, or getting real political or any thing. I'd like to think that what I'm doing is going over there to get as sound a picture as possible to bring back to these kids, so that they get a clear picture of what's happening. I see that as my role. I don't see myself going over to preach or tell them what they should be doing. I, too, think that is a big part of the mediation process -- listening and gathering information. Finding out the facts is really important to this whole concept of peace; it's really listening and observing what's really happening.

Although the technology is important to his practice, he views it as insignificant in comparison to the real work needed to be done in classrooms:

> With or without the technology, we're still going to be challenged by all of these hard realities, the social realities, and we can either use the technology the right way or it can become a problem, and it can actually be used by people who do not have the best interests of our children in mind. So you know there's really room for abuse from the user end and from the supplier end. I think my philosophy is being shaped by this need to build and maintain community, and if we're not doing that, then we're not doing what we're supposed to be doing. Being responsible

consumers of information and teaching kids how to sift through the wheat and the chaff -- that's a 21st century teaching objective.

Conclusion

Clearly, Fritsche has built a reputation as a school where kids want to be, and this is due in part to the non-threatening, learning environment that Fritsche works hard to construct and sustain. On the front of the school building a large banner reads, "Fritsche -- Where Knowledge Builds Peace " which is a distinct expression of their deep commitment to the principles of peace education.

These efforts have completely turned Fritsche Middle School around. The school experienced a decrease in course failure from 10%to 4.4% in a two year period. Parent involvement increased along with grade point averages and in this district where school choice is practiced, Fritsche Middle School is proud to report that over 80% of the students are at this school by their first choice, including the minority student population. The principal's goal to get this school to achieve the same status as highly popular specialty middle schools has been met. He accomplished this with a daily attendance rate of 86.7% which is similar to the rate at specialty schools and he attributes this success to the use of peace education and the peer mediation program.

Scott Willis (1993) argues that while peer mediation programs do experience margins of success, they only scratch the surface of dealing with issues of conflict. He asserts that rather than training a select cadre of peer mediators, every student and staff member in the school building needs constant exposure to peace making philosophies in order to overcome the inherent desire to act violently when confronted with controversy. Additionally, teachers must resist the temptation to rely on conflict resolution programs as a method of fixing the students and then expecting all the other

problems that exist within the school walls to disappear. Teachers must buy into the concept of incorporating peace education into their curriculum as not only an effective way of deterring violence, but also as a way of creating a classroom atmosphere of mutual respect and as a means of nurturing the development of students into responsible human beings.

Fritsche is certainly a model school that is reaping the rewards of earnest effort toward creating a peaceful climate that encourages students to come to school and succeed. Sautter (1994) suspects the hardest part of a solid peace education plan is finding ways to expose young people to adults who really care about them, can provide support when they experience problems, and guide and facilitate their educational goals. Another important aspect of an encompassing peace program provides opportunities for students to make connections in society that will stimulate and broaden their cultural perspectives and economic outlooks. Lastly, and most importantly, research on school climate demonstrates that adherence to peace principles can improve academic achievement in urban schools. The fully successful program will have as a priority the goal of making these program opportunities available to every student who needs them. Addressing and meeting these issues as fundamental goals are the foundation for really cooling the climate of Fritsche or virturally any school.

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